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ON THE ORIGIN OF THE TOPONYM TBILISI

Abstract

In the scientific literature, there are two viewpoints on the etymology of the name Tbilisi and priority is given to the version, according to which the name of the Georgian capital had been derived from the Georgian adjective *tbili//tpil* by adding the ending *-is* to it.

The author of the paper does not share this opinion, first of all, due to the fact that the topo formant *-is* does not form toponyms from adjectives.

The version of deriving *"Tbilisi"* from *"tbili"* (warm) is not justified in foreign (Greek, Armenian) sources either. In the first century A.D., Josephus Flavius put forward his view according to which the Iberians originate from Tobel. This opinion was shared by many scholars afterwards.

In the present paper, on the basis of linguistic and historical evidence, there is an attempt to show that the name of our royal town is connected with the ethnonym Tubal. The deity of smithery as Tobel is known in Qiziki and Meskheti. According to the opinion of some scholars (V. Saint-Martin, A. Khakhanashvili, Arch. Baramidze, G. Kavtaradze), in the name of the city of ancient Kartli Uplistsikhe, there is the biblical ethnonym **Tubal** with the initial consonant being lost.

In the Armenian language, together with the names of Tbilisi, adapted from Georgian, we encounter ***tpkhq*** form, which is supposedly obtained as a result of phonetic changes ****tplq > tpghq > tpkhq***. It is worth mentioning that the Armenian suffix *q*, equivalent to the Kartvelian *-kh* for forming nouns, is mainly added to ethnonyms.

In the name of Tbilisi, it is more possible to suggest the reference to the Babylonian ethnonym and patron deity of smithery Tabal than Biblical **Tobal//Tubal**. Tabal must be the old Semitic form of the Sper province from the historical South-West region of Georgia. In view of the *s > h* phonetic change, **Sper** is given as **Havila** in the Old Testament in which the land of Havilah is mentioned (Genesis 2: 12).

Tabal could have given the form ****Tablis//*Taplis***.

The author of the paper thinks that the old name of our capital *Tpilisi* is obtained as a result of contamination of ****Tablisi*** and the adjective ***tpili.***

Keywords: Tbilisi, tpili, Tabal, Tubal, contamination.

Tbilisi is one of the ancient cities in the world. According to historians, in its place as early as the 2nd century B.C., there was a city-type settlement.

There are two points of view about the origin of the capital of Iberia or Kartli in the scientific literature. Among the assumptions, the most common is the version due to which our royal city was given this name because of sulfur hot springs. In ancient Georgian ***tbili*** is known as ***tpili***; consequently, the town was called Tbilisi.

According to earlier assumptions, the oikonym to be considered is related to the name of Noah's younger son Japheth from the Old Testament (Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras (Genesis 10: 2).

The above hypothesis, which was first advanced by J. Claproth in 1823, was later shared by many Georgian and foreign scholars (Pl. Ioseliani, D. Bakradze and N. Berdznishvili, N. Goriaev, M. Janashvili, K. Hahn, S. Kakabadze, A. Shanidze, G. Bedoshili, T. Beridze, as well as other authors of scientific works about Tbilisi, published in different encyclopedia).

In A. Chkadua's opinion, the toponym Tbilisi is derived from **Tepilisi < *Tipilisi* (Chkadua 1987, 183).

In the present paper, we put forth our doubts concerning the popular version about the origin of Tbilisi due to the following circumstances:

The suffix *-is,* which is the ending of the genitive case, does not form toponyms from adjectives, e. g. we can't name any geographical name connected with water, which would be formed by means of this suffix: *tskhelisi, tsivisi, grilisi,* etc. This topo formant is, as a rule, added to nouns: *ru* – Ruisi, old Georgian *mangal* – Manglisi, *nichab* – Nichbisi, etc.

The relation of the name of Georgia's royal town with *tbili* (warm) is not shown in Mingrelian either, where this adjective is watched in the Georgian-Zan toponym Tskhaltubo, and maybe in Gvishtibi too. In Mingrelian, first the Armazi fortress (Armazis-tsikhe) and later when the capital was moved from Mtskheta, one of the ancient capitals of Georgia, into Tbilisi, it was also named **Qarti**.

As is known, ancient Greek travelers used to translate some Georgian geographical names into Greek. In S. Kaukhchishvili's opinion: "Petra should be searched near Batumi, and it must be the translation of the local name, like Hippos – Tskenistkali, Archeopolis – Nokalakevi, Rodopolis – Vardtsikhe" (Georgica II, 1965, 105). It should be noted that Petra is based on the Zan equivalent of the Georgian Pitalo (cp. Micropotamonim in Lazistan – Petroghali (rock spring).

In the Armenian language, Tbilisi was named ***Paitakaran***, meaning the town, built of wood, evidently because of many wooden constructions or wood stores in the city. In Armenian texts, there are two forms: ***Tiplis*** and ***Tipghis***. Below we will discuss one more name of Tbilisi in Armenian.

The second argument about the name of the royal town of our country has a long history. It was as early as the first century A.D. that Josephus Flavius expressed his opinion according to which the name of our royal town originates from **Tobel** – by the Biblical genealogy, the son of Japheth (younger son of Noah). Tobel is said to have formed **Tobelians,** who are now named **Iberians** (Georgica I, 1961, 271).

The above version of the Jewish scholar was shared by many scientists in different countries. We will mention some of them. At the end of the 18th century, the well-known French orientalist, traveler, and politician Constantin François Volney (count Boisgirais) thought **Tobel** from the Old Testament to have given rise to the name **Tbilisi**. This point of view has been reflected in the scientific work, issued by Georgian Catholics in Montauban, France (Shanidze 1958, 20).

In the last century, famous Armenologist L. Melikset-Beg tried to prove this version for a long time. In 1966, in the collection of papers dedicated to the 1500th anniversary of Tbilisi, he shared the opinion that the name Tbilisi may have been given to the town because of hot spring waters, though he does not exclude the supposed link of this name with the Biblical, proper name (Melikset-Beg 1958, 32).

For the validity of this version very important is the opinion of the great Georgian scientist A. Shanidze. We can cite his words, taken from the mentioned jubilee collection: "The name of Tbilisi originates indeed from the warm springs which are so abundant in this town…" (Shanidze 1958, 20).

As can be seen from this list, this question cannot be considered to be finally solved.

Before we start presenting our point of view, let us say a few words about the reasons why King Vakhtang Gorgasali decided to move the capital city from Mtskheta to Tbilisi.

At that time, Georgia was the vassal of Persia, Persian Pitiakhsh, residing in Tbilisi, was controlling the administration of Georgia from Mtskheta. However, King Saint Vakhtang Gorgasali had far-going political and economic plans, and one of the most important among them was the liberation of Iberia (Kartli) from the rule of the invaders. After incorporating Kukheti and Hereti, Tbilisi, where the main road connecting Kartli with Iran passed, appeared in the middle of several geographical-historical regions, besides the city on the upland would be more easily defensible and, the narrow river-bed of the river Mtkvari at Metekhi, would make favorable conditions for building the bridge and last, Tbilisi was surrounded by far better cultivable land than Mtskheta.

The so-called "sheep roads" passed through this town, leading to Kizlar of the North Caucasus on the one hand and Kars on the other hand.

In our opinion, like Mtskheta, which is related to the ethnonym *Meskh* by some scientists (V. Topuria), the etymology of Tbilisi also leads us to the Biblical, proper names. In some examples from the books of the Old Testament, Tubal is used together with *Meshekh* (Old Hebrew version of *Meskh* – K. Tsereteli), which is recorded in Georgia as the proper name Tubal, as well as the surname, derived from it (Leonidze 1961, 2).

Even more important is the fact that this proper name has been recorded in our country as Tobel in Eastern Georgia and Topel in Meskheti, in both cases meaning the deity of smithery (Rekhviashvili 1964, 251).

According to the opinion of some scholars (V. Saint-Martin, A. Khakhanashvili, Arch. Baramidze, G. Kavtaradze), in the name of the city of ancient Kartli Uplistsikhe, there is the biblical ethnonym **Tupal** with the initial consonant being lost.

Tubal is encountered in the Bible in the composite **Tubal-cain** as well. Some scientists, I. Javakhishvili among them, mention the Babylonian **Tabal** in relation to Tubal. We don't think justifiable the opinion (Janashia 1952, 8) that in Tabal one can trace the archaic form of the Georgian word *tba* (lake). In this aspect, it should be taken into account that at the middle reaches of the river Halis (Ghal in the Zan language), there is the famous lake **Topada** where the Zan ***toba*** can be detected for denoting the lake.

It is not justifiable to identify **Tabal, Tubal**, and **Tobel** by the data of the Kartvelian languages. If we take into account the fact that the influence of the Mesopotamian civilization on the Hebrew world is great, Tubal is a secondary form as compared to the Akkadian Tabal, where the first vowel *o* or *u* are formed from *a* owing to the labial consonant *b*.

What do we have to know about the Biblical Tubal, which, as seen from the above examples, is used as the anthroponym and ethnoponym?

Many Georgian scholars share the opinion that Tubal is connected with the ethnonym Iber. M. Chukhua, who takes into consideration the opinion of "the father of Armenian history", Movses Khorenatsi, thinks that the name of **bronze** is connected with the toponym **Sper**. **Tabal** is the old Semitic representation of **Sper**, the historical South-West part of Georgia. According to Strabon, in the Antique period, this place belonged to Armenia. M. Chukhua thinks that the word meaning bronze is testified in Sumerian as ***zabar*** and ***sipar***, and as ***sipparum*** in Akkadian (Chukhua 2019, 36).

There is a point of view, shared by some Georgian scholars that under **Sper** was meant a far larger territory than it is shown in historical sources (D. Muskhelishvili). Suffice it to mention the fact that the Black Sea, together with the Kartvelian Sea, was called the **Sper Sea**. In our opinion, Sper is detected in the old Mesopotamian ethnonym ***Subar*** **(Khurit).** The transformation of a sibilant into dental is the representation of the ethnonym ***Asur*** as ***Atur***. It is well-known that in the languages of different families, there is a phonetic transformation of ***s > h > i*** (Janashia 1952, 8). Taking into consideration this phonetic peculiarity, we think that Sper is given in the Bible as **Havilah** (in the Georgian translation Khavila): (Genesis 2: 10) "A river flowed out of Eden to water the Garden of Eden. There it is divided and became four rivers. (Genesis 2: 11) The name of the first is **Pishon**. It is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah where there is gold; (Genesis 2: 12) and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stones are there".

As to Cain, I think it is the Hebrew interpretation of the Georgian ethnonym ***tsen***. In old Hebrew, **Cain** got the meaning of a blacksmith, which testifies the domination of this ethnos in metalworking. Later, ***tsen*** had been changed, and we received ***chen*** and ***chan***. Thus, under **Tubal-cain,** people that according to the Old Testament were selling slaves, copper, and iron in **Tyre**, are again meant the people of the historical South-West part of our country. **Tubal** is for **Sper,** and **Cain** is for **Chaneti (Lazistan),** whose priority in metalworking is proved by the Georgian terms, denoting metal in Semitic languages, and is described by ancient Greek authors.

If now we go back to the main topic of our paper – the origin of Tbilisi, we should recall the well-known fact from the history of Georgia that the names of our country's towns often came from the names of the fortresses, which were at the same time dwellings of the noblemen. Due to this, we can assume that the pre-image of Tbilisi was the ***Tabal** fortified city. Bearing in mind that in Georgian words whose roots end in *-al,* the vowel is contracted (*namgali - namglis, mamali - mamlis, mdzakhali - mdzakhlis,* etc.), there might be ***Tablisi***. The name of the Georgian capital also sounds like ***Tablis*** in oriental languages.

In this connection, attention should be paid to the fact that in Armenian, parallel to the forms introduced from Georgian to denote the name Tbilisi, we have the form ***tpkhq,*** which is obtained by ***tplq > tpghq*** and resulted to ***tpkhq*** through assimilation. In this name, ***q*** is equivalent to ***kh*** of Kartvelian ethnonyms (**Colch, Taoch, Javakh**): ***Haiq*** (Armenia), ***Virq*** (Georgia), ***Aghvanq*** (Albania), etc. This suffix in Armenian as in Georgian is mostly added to ethnonyms, rarely to common nouns, e.g. ***Vanq*** – "temple".

Now the question arises: if this is the case, then how did we get ***Tiflis*** in Georgian, which had been used till 1937?

We can suppose that since the healing properties of hot springs and baths in our capital had become very popular throughout the world, to the ethnonym we are interested in and, which is related to

the guardian deity of smithery – **Tabal**, adjective ***tbili* (warm)** was added. As is known, in Georgia, there were historically many gods of metalworking – **Solan, Solom, Amiran, Saint George, Tobal,** etc. In linguistics, there is a point of view, according to which folk etymology became especially popular in explaining proper names. Hence as a result of contamination of the above two words – a proper noun and an adjective, we got an old Georgian form – ***Tfilisi*.**

In foreign languages, the name of our capital town is based on the Georgian Tbilisi, and respectively, together with the suffix of the Nominative case, is used in many languages, English among them – **Tbilisi.**

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